

LOVERS AND SURVIVORS

A short play

by
Aaron Leventman

Copyright Aaron Leventman © 2021

CHARACTERS

Bruce Male shown at ages 13-50

Jeffrey Male shown at ages 13-50

NOTES:

The play should be performed by the same two actors who are shown at 3 different ages. Set pieces, props, and costumes can be kept at an absolute minimal with as much indicated/mimed as possible for rapid scene changes.

School cafeteria, 1968

AT RISE:

The clattering of dishes is heard with the slamming down of trays, loud chatter. JEFFREY, 13-years-old, sits eating alone at a table, methodically, bored. BRUCE enters, same age, looks around, slams his tray down on the table and joins Jeffrey at the opposite end. He eats voraciously before looking up to notice that Jeffrey is even there. He nods in his direction. Jeffrey hesitantly nods back. Bruce starts humming Lady Madonna by the Beatles. Is it absentmindedly or intentional? He stops humming and looks at Jeffrey.

BRUCE

What's that smell?

JEFFREY

Disinfectant and bad tater tots.

Bruce shrugs his shoulders and goes back to humming the same song.

JEFFREY

Lady Madonna?

BRUCE

Yeah. The Beatles. They are the best.

JEFFREY

(with a sense of containment)

They're okay.

BRUCE

John's my favorite.

JEFFREY

I like Paul.

BRUCE

Why?

JEFFREY

He's the most, uh, cool looking.

BRUCE

(Smiles knowingly)

Yeah. Cool looking. So, you're eating by yourself.

JEFFREY

So are you.

BRUCE

I just moved here. Don't know anyone.

JEFFREY

I live here and still don't know anyone. Everyone's a total bummer.

BRUCE

My last school was the same.

JEFFREY

I guess you got kicked out.

BRUCE

No, I *bugged* out.

JEFFREY

Really?

BRUCE

Yeah. Got into a fight.

JEFFREY

So that's how you got that scar above your eye.

BRUCE

Yeah, this asshole Jimmy pushed me against the wall in gym class and I hit the corner of the locker. Fuckin' hurt.

JEFFREY

I hate that shit. Those jerks bug you for no reason.

BRUCE

I guess I liked Paul McCartney too much.

JEFFREY

Oh.

He gets it.

BRUCE

He didn't even get into trouble. His father was the principal. Just had to say he was sorry but I know he didn't mean it.

JEFFREY

What a bummer.

BRUCE

I asked my Mom if we could move out somewhere far like California or Hawaii but she has this job she likes working on the Humphrey campaign and my Dad's a jerk and just went along with it. I fuckin' hate it here.

JEFFREY

Yeah, West Roxbury's the pits. Whose Humphrey?

BRUCE

He's some asshole running for president.

JEFFREY

That's cool that your Mom works. Mine just sits around all day watching *Days of Our Lives*.

BRUCE

Yeah, she took me to see Frank Zappa at Boston Jazz Festival. It was a gas.

JEFFREY

You went to a concert with your Mom?

BRUCE

Yeah. Who else would I go with?

JEFFREY

I don't know Frank Zappa but I'd go with you.

BRUCE

Oh, yeah?

The bell rings indicating that it's the end of lunchtime. Bruce and Jeffrey start to gather up their trays.

JEFFREY

You didn't finish your lunch.

BRUCE

It's okay You're right about these tater tots. They stink. You want my chocolate milk?

JEFFREY

My Mom says I can't have it. It makes me sick or something. And I got gym next.

BRUCE

Me, too. Want to cut with me?

JEFFREY

Uh, I don't know.

BRUCE

They're showing *Rosemary's Baby* at the Brattle Theater. Wanna sneak in?

JEFFREY

Yeah!

* * *

Hospital room, 1995

AT RISE:

Bruce, early 40s, lies in bed listlessly. The television is on as sounds from The Sound of Music play from it mixed in with the sounds of machines beeping, and the loudspeaker making mundane announcements.

Jeffrey enters the hospital with an Act-Up hat on and sunglasses. He hurries over to Bruce's bed.

BRUCE

You're late. Maria already established that the hills are alive. And what's with the get-up?

JEFFREY

Nurse Ratched is out there again and wouldn't let me in. At least she would have if you were my husband. But I guess friends don't count anymore.

BRUCE

Wait a minute. You're not my husband?

JEFFREY

Just because we fooled around in summer camp when we were 14 doesn't cut it.

BRUCE

You forgot about the time we were drunk off our asses at Rainbow Mountain and I let you jerk me off before we passed out on the couch.

JEFFREY

"Let you?" You practically begged me.

BRUCE

Maybe that's how you remember it.

JEFFREY

And no husband would change your bed pan.

BRUCE

That's true. When Carlo saw what he had to do to take care of me, like Julie Andrews, he headed for the hills.

JEFFREY

Not without infecting you first. No offense but you have worse taste in husbands than Liza Minelli.

BRUCE

You're just jealous.

JEFFREY

Maybe we'll get to have husbands someday. We all thought Clinton in office would change that.

BRUCE

You and I have been around long enough to know how that goes. Now after three years of him all we can look forward to is not asking and telling.

JEFFREY

And you and I have been around long enough to know that that's all we've done our whole lives. We asked. We told. We suffered the consequences. I brought you some treats.

BRUCE

What am I? A dog?

JEFFREY

Yes.

Jeffrey takes croissants out of a bag from Au Bon Pain.

JEFFREY

Chocolate and spinach with cheese. Your favorites.

BRUCE

I can't eat those.

JEFFREY

Come on. Your attempts at keeping your girlish figure are going too far.

Jeffrey takes the croissants out of the bag and hands them to Bruce on a napkin.

BRUCE

No, really. I can't eat that.

Jeffrey is disappointed and puts them back in the bag.

JEFFREY

Well, maybe later.

(pause)

You're getting back at me for not taking your chocolate milk 25 years ago.

BRUCE

Actually, Bruce, I'm so fucking tired I can barely speak.

JEFFREY

Works for me.

A bell is heard from the TV as it rings in the abbey.

BRUCE

This is the first time I can't keep my eyes open to watch *The Sound of Music*.

JEFFREY

We better get some speed in you and wake up. We still have 3 hours to go. She hasn't even climbed every mountain yet.

Bruce points to the lesion on his face from Kaposi Sarcoma which is out of view.

BRUCE

Does it look as bad as I think it does?

JEFFREY

Not at all. It looks more like a fake beauty mark. Think Glenn Close in *Dangerous Liaisons*. Or should I say dangerous lesions

BRUCE

Or in the case of your sisters, dangerous lesbians.

JEFFREY

Exactly.

BRUCE

I'm too tired to laugh.

JEFFREY

Then go to sleep, sweet prince.

BRUCE

You mean princess. And a Jewish American one at that.

Bruce falls asleep on Jeffrey's shoulders.

JEFFREY

Don't leave us, just yet, my friend.

Climb Every Mountain is heard from the TV.

* * *

Outside of a nursing home, 2005

AT RISE:

Jeffrey sits on a park bench holding flowers. Sounds of birds chirping and a gentle wind through the trees is heard. Bruce enters in a wheelchair.

JEFFREY

Please, don't get up.

BRUCE

Bitch. And are those carnations in that bouquet? You can't be serious.

JEFFREY

Not just a bouquet.

He pulls out a small bag from Fanny Farmers and takes a chocolate bar out of it.

BRUCE

Wow. Fanny Farmers. You really went all out.

JEFFREY

Only the best for you, my princess.

BRUCE

We're always bringing each other things we can't eat. No sugar anymore for me. Bad for the immune system.

JEFFREY

You always were a fussy bitch.

Jeffrey opens the candy bar and starts to eat it himself.

BRUCE

Please. Don't stand on ceremony. So much for being lactose intolerant.

JEFFREY

I took my pills.

Jeffrey looks at the surroundings.

JEFFREY (CONT'D)

This place still doesn't look so bad. Better than Diana Ross' rehab in *Lady Sings the Blues*.

BRUCE

That was a different kind of rehab. She was only there for 30 days and not 10 years.

JEFFREY

Well, they only gave you 10 months to live and now look at you. You'll probably outlive us all.

BRUCE

Yep. That fucking disease turned me into a gimp but to quote from Shirley MacLaine in *Postcards from the Edge* "I'm still here." And that's even with W. getting re-elected. Look what I found.

Bruce pulls out a record cover from a bag attached to his chair handle.

JEFFREY

Oh my God! An original edition. Paul was as beautiful as I remember. And now look at him. Do we look that old, too?

BRUCE

Much worse. Just to think. I used to wear Beatles t-shirts in high school and now I should wear one that says Long Term Survivor.

JEFFREY

We're lovers *and* survivors.

BRUCE

The former not in a long time. An old cripple with AIDS doesn't rate very high on the dating track.

JEFFREY

Where's everyone's sense of imagination?

BRUCE

Don't get too into that chocolate bar. The lunch bell will ring any second.

JEFFREY

Our lives ruled by the sound of the bell but has anything really changed since junior high?

BRUCE

Nothing's changed yet nothing's the same. Lovers and family members have come and gone. But you're stuck with me through-out when no one else did. Why is that?

JEFFREY

I don't know much after all these years except one thing, that I'd do anything for you.

BRUCE

You would?

JEFFREY

You don't know that by now? How long have I known you?

BRUCE

I'm a nervous queen. I need lots of reassurance.

JEFFREY

Ya think? So I have some news. You're finally moving out of here.

BRUCE

What do you mean?

JEFFREY

Simon dumped me again and I'm looking for a new roommate.

BRUCE

Again? You're the Richard Burton/Liz Taylor of marriages. Including the weight gain.

JEFFREY

Don't knock Liz Taylor. She saved our lives. So whatdya say? I had a ramp put in because, speaking of weight gain, if you think I'm carrying you up those stairs every day you have another thing coming.

BRUCE

I don't know what to say.

in Santa Fe on opening night for the first time in the city's history. His recent play was a finalist for the Samuel French OOB One Act Play Festival and the Secret Theatre's One Act Factor. He was the producer of a monthly online LGBTQ+ short play series which has been bringing together talent and audiences from all over the world.

Aaron is also a playwriting, screenwriting, acting, and film history instructor at Santa Fe Community College, a film festival curator, and has a private writing coach practice. He was proud to have been recently chosen as a fan guest host on Turner Classic Movies. <https://aaronleventman.com>.